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INFO RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 7403
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RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 4998
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 3724
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0451
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C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 000675

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/ELA, PRM
E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/25/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [IO](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: IOM CONCERNED ABOUT REFUGEE REPATRIATION AND LOCAL
STAFFING

REF: DAMASCUS 630

Classified By: CDA Maura Connelly for reasons 1.4(b,d)

11. (C) Summary: During an introductory call on IOM Chief of Mission Maria Rumman, Rumman relayed to Charge recent conversations between IOM staff and representatives of the Iraqi government which principally focused on how the GOI could best repatriate its citizens that have sought refuge in Syria. Additionally, Rumman passed her concerns regarding IOM staff hiring and retention, a situation that is becoming increasingly acute as IOM seeks to expand operations to meet the significantly larger USG Iraqi refugee resettlement quota. End Summary.

12. (C) Charge paid an introductory call on September 17 on Maria Rumman, Chief of Mission for the Damascus office of the International Organization for Migration(IOM). Rumman discussed the August 30 visit of Iraqi Minister for Migration and Displacement Abdul Samed Sultan (reftel) and her September 16 meeting with Khalid al-Jubory, General Director for the Office of the Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister. Rumman said al-Jubory discussed GOI efforts to assist Iraqi refugees in Syria, including direct monetary assistance and lobbying the SARG to grant refugees work permits. Rumman noted to al-Jubory that many Iraqi refugees currently work in Syria's "informal" sector, and said she did not think that the SARG would be receptive to granting them official work authorization. Al-Jubory also raised the issue of repatriation with the possible assistance of IOM Damascus, but Rumman cautioned against a mass repatriation initiative before Iraq was fully prepared to receive large numbers of returnees. Rumman also informed al-Jubory that repatriation was not within IOM's current mandate.

13. (C) Separately, Rumman also discussed IOM's staffing concerns. IOM is again preparing to expand its staff in conjunction with the expanding presence of DHS/USCIS personnel in Damascus in an effort to meet USG resettlement goals. At the same time, Rumman said her immediate concern was retaining her current, trained local staff given increasing domestic economic pressure. Rumman reported that several of her staff members were working well above their pay grades and feared these staffers would leave IOM for greener pastures rather than continuing to wait for promotions. (Note: In a separate conversation, IOM staffers told us that they indeed were considering employment with the higher-paying UNHCR, which is also expanding operations in Damascus). Charge said that Post would look into the issue, but reminded Rumman that this is an internal IOM matter.

14. (C) Comment: Post is keenly aware that the persistent staffing problems at IOM may critically affect our

resettlement goals for FY09 and will continue to monitor IOM's efforts to address this issue. With respect to GOI efforts to repatriate Iraqis residing in Syria, the Iraqi Embassy here appears increasingly engaged on this issue. Few details have emerged, however, as to how the repatriation process will move forward, such as what assistance will be offered in advance of -- and after -- a refugee returns, and the extent to which Iraqis are interested in returning at this time. The UN continues to monitor this situation but has expressed skepticism about the success of a return program that does not provide an expansive safety net of services for returnees.

CONNELLY